

Pregnancy Woes

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Pregnancy Woes

by [Quiet_Shadow](#)

Summary

When Sentinel Prime had entered his 'arrangement' with the Magnus, it had been done in good fun -- and because, truthfully, it couldn't harm his career and could very well put the Prime in a better position to inherit the Magnus title later on. The thing is, when he had entered the 'arrangement', he had done it under the impression Ultra Magnus was sterile. Which, as Sentinel is slowly finding out, might have been a stretch of the truth. So what is a Prime to do when he's Carrying his Magnus' Sparkling and unwilling to let the other mech know?

Notes

Hello ladies and gentlemen and welcome to 2017 with a new Sentinel fic ^^
I started writing this one in 2015, then dropped it when my interest drifted away. I recently reopened the doc and decided to finish it one way or another. It was originally supposed to be much longer, with more plot and characters, a kidnapped Sentinel, some Megatron/Sentinel thrown in for flavor and other assorted pairings and goodness. But since I long since lost my notes (provided I even took any) and I didn't feel like making a big, big fic anymore out of it, I went with a simpler idea. The result is... far nicer than usual for Sentinel in a Woes series fic. Kinda.
Anyway, here's hoping 2017 will be a good year.
Enjoy the reading :)

“Unf... unf... ah...aaaaah, Sir!” Hands firmly grasping the edge of the desk, Sentinel panted and whined as he felt his lover’s spike slide deeper inside him, stroking his internal nodes with each thrust. His valve rippled around the hard length stretching him wide.

“Hush, Sentinel,” Ultra Magnus whispered, his lips brushing against the Prime’s helm fins even as he continued to rock his hips against the smaller mech’s frame. His hands held the Prime’s waist steadily as he took his time to frag his subordinate. He too was panting, but in a more discreet fashion, as he felt his spike being surrounded by exquisite wet heat. Lubricant dripped from Sentinel’s valve, coating the Magnus’ rod with each move. “Hmm... so good...”

Sentinel whimpered as the Magnus picked up his pace, going faster and faster until finally in pleasure as the Prime felt a rush of fluid inside his valve, which triggered his own overload in turn. He keened loudly as his valve rippled, milking out all the transfluid it could before he slumped forward, systems fighting down a bout of temporary exhaustion.

Ultra Magnus withdrew carefully before gently turning Sentinel over, bending forward to kiss him. The kiss they shared was almost chaste, and the Magnus leaned back with a satisfied smile. “Thank you, Sentinel. You were perfect.”

“At your service, Sir,” the Prime rumbled as he grabbed a rag out of subspace to clean up the mess between his legs. After a klik of pause, he took another rag out of his subspace pocket and handed it to his superior, who gladly took it and started to also clean himself, to Sentinel’s satisfaction. His blue optics frantically looked around for any dirty spot to clean -- to get fragged by the Magnus in his office was one thing, but to get caught was quite another! He couldn’t allow a single drop of lubricant or transfluid to be found!

Thankfully, it seemed that this time, they had been relatively clean, and Sentinel almost sagged in relief before standing straighter as Ultra Magnus glanced in his way. He let his panel slide back into position, hiding his interface components, before standing at attention.

“Will you require my presence further, Sir, or may I get back to work?” he asked politely.

“Hum? Oh, yes, yes,” Ultra Magnus waved, optics distant. “Back to work. You can come back in a megacycle, I’ll have finished to sign those reports by then. Thank you again for your time, Sentinel Prime.”

“It was my pleasure, Sir,” Sentinel assured him before leaving at a pace that wasn’t too hurried but not too slow either. He could feel his superior’s optics on him, and he just knew the old mech had to be looking at his aft.

It filled the Prime with a mixture of pride and annoyance. Pride, because he was an handsome mech and he liked to be seen as such. Annoyance because... well, he wasn’t that much of a valve mech, but he couldn’t say ‘no’ when the Magnus asked him for ‘personal favors’, could he?

It didn’t happen that often. Twice a decacycle on average, thrice if the Magnus felt particularly excited. In those case, both Ultra and his Second would lock themselves in the Magnus’ office, or they would rent a room at a nearby hotel for a megacycle or two. Sentinel would obediently spread his legs wide and Ultra Magnus would spike him. They weren’t exactly a couple. They just had an ‘arrangement’, so to speak, to relieve themselves of their tenseness.

Sentinel’s biggest complaint would have been the fact he always ended up being spiked. However, given Ultra Magnus was both his superior and the eldest of them, it was expected that Sentinel

submit to his whims -- which were relatively modest, once everything was said and done. The Magnus just liked to top and Sentinel had to grudgingly admit he was good at it.

Sentinel knew he could very much refuse to interface; he had indeed done so once or twice, to test if what the Magnus said was true, that he was under no obligation to interface with the Autobots' Supreme ruler and that he wouldn't be sacked if he didn't. The old mech had never seemed bothered by the Prime's refusal. Whenever it happened, he just sighed wistfully and returned to work as if nothing had happened, thus comforting Sentinel in the idea he could indeed refuse whenever he wanted...

... but though it wasn't his preferred activity, interfacing with the Magnus whenever the old mech asked for his 'company' was in Sentinel's best interest. If anything, it couldn't harm his career and could very well put the Prime in a better position to inherit the Magnus title once Ultra would be retiring.

And even if he wasn't overly fond of being spiked -- true mechs didn't play bottom, after all, or so his Sire had repeatedly told him when he had been young -- he had to admit Ultra Magnus was rather good in the berth, and the overloads were quite enjoyable. So, if getting spiked was the price to pay for having a privileged position, Sentinel had little reason to complain.

*_*_*_*_*

"Your Spark feels wonderfully warm."

Sentinel turned his head slightly to the side in order to glance at Ultra Magnus. Both of them were lying on the large, comfortable berth of the hotel room the Magnus had rented for two megacycles near the Metroplex. It had been yet another standard tryst between them, the Magnus pawing at him the moment the room's door locked behind them, and Sentinel had eagerly answered to the kisses and groping. A way for them to blow out the steam after a meeting with the Civilian Guilds. Personally, the Prime couldn't see how or why Ultra Magnus tolerated their revendications, especially those of that old fossil Alpha Trion. Had he been Magnus himself, they wouldn't have dared...

But it was beyond the point. The meeting had gone out as usual, and then they had retired to the hotel, as usual, where they had interfaced as usual. Oh, and shared Sparks, which was less usual, but something they still did occasionally. So long they both kept their firewalls up and made sure not to synchronize their systems by plugging into each other before, during and after a prolonged merge, there was no chance they'd end up Bonded.

Sparks sharing was... far more intimate than what Sentinel would have wished from their affairs, if he was honest about it. It implied a degree of intimacy he had rarely reached with anyone, Elita and Optimus asides. Both were now dead, though; Elita to Optimus' mistake, and Optimus himself to Decepticons. The idiot had crossed a Decepticon patrol and although Cybertron had sent them reinforcements, they had come in too late. The *Orion* had disappeared and its crew as well, all presumed dead and destroyed.

He supposed he should have been sad -- Optimus had been a friend, once upon a time. However, the loathing he felt for the mech who had allowed Elita to deactivate was stronger than whatever kinship they might have shared once upon a time. Optimus' untimely passing barely made him bat an optic. Perhaps, some cycle, he'd find it in himself to forgive and forget... but this day hadn't come yet, and so he tried to put aside any memory of Optimus.

In truth, little to no one in the Autobots ranks seemed to have taken notice of the maintenance team's disappearance -- but then again, they were just maintenance bots. The lowest of the lowest

cogs in the 'great Autobot machine'.

But if the passing of the crew didn't warrant any special worry, the fact their ship had also disappeared with them gathered worries from the higher ups. The loss of the *Orion* seemed to have sent some of the Council members into a frenzy, for a reason Sentinel had yet to determinate. It was classed top-secret, and to the Prime's annoyance, he didn't have the right clearance to access the file. Which really galled at him, for he was the Elite Guard sub-commander; he should have been aware of all potential secrets!

A hand squeezed his briefly. "You're over thinking again, aren't you?" Ultra Magnus rumbled, turning to his side to better cuddle against the smaller mech's frame.

Sentinel tried to smile and squeezed the Magnus' hand back. "Perhaps I am," he admitted, trying to sound level as he curled against his superior. "You were saying?"

"Your Spark. It feels so warm. It's almost a surprise, given how cold you try to ask in public. As if all your feelings, all your passion was hidden away inside your Spark casing." A large hand brushed against Sentinel's now closed chestplate. "I know I have said it already, but I'm happy you let me bask in that heat every now and then, and I truly regret we don't do it more often. But if you don't feel comfortable with the act of merging..." He left his words hanging.

"Not uncomfortable," Sentinel said hastily. "Just... cautious," he finished lamely. Sparks were private; they weren't meant to be casually shared with everyone. And accidental Bonding was always possible, not to mention the possibility to get Sparked up, which Sentinel dreaded. It was yet another reason he didn't like getting spiked; one load of transfluid too many in his valve and reproductive chamber, and he'd end up Carrying and having to suffer a ruined silhouette for orbital cycles until he gave birth to a Sparkling that he'd have to raise instead of making his career progress.

Thankfully, everyone knew the Magnus was sterile; the tabloids had run the subject and milked it out for everything it was worth for thousands of stellar cycles. If he was honest with himself, the Prime would have confessed he'd only agreed to Ultra Magnus' offer because of this lack of risk.

He quickly pressed a kiss on Ultra Magnus' cheek. "But just because I'm cautious doesn't mean I don't enjoy myself... or that I don't want to enjoy myself some more," he added as an afterthought.

The older mech smirked. "Oh? Does that mean you're ready another round?" he purred as he moved and straddled Sentinel's frame, shifting to gently spread the black thighs of his subordinate apart. He licked his lips hungrily at the sight of the bare valve and the tiny bright blue exterior node crowning the narrow opening, the lips still swollen and coated with a thin layer of lubricant and transfluid.

Sentinel just smiled and spread them wider, given Ultra Magnus full access to his body, gasping as he felt the tip of an already repressurized spike nudge the lips of his valve apart. "By all means, Sir," he gasped out against as he felt the tip spreading them aside and slowly sliding into him, its progression helped by the leftover moistness from their previous activities. "Mmmmh, Sir," he whined, hands grabbing the mesh of the berth as he was slowly impaled on that hard length, ridges stroking his nodes and sending them alight as pleasure started to course through his frame.

A large hand grabbed his hip, shifting him and forcing him to raise his leg. Ultra Magnus grabbed it with his free hand and put it over his shoulder, and Sentinel keened as the new angle allowed the Magnus to thrust in deeper. "Ooooh, Sir!"

Ultra Magnus chuckled. “When we’re like that, Sentinel, you can call me Ultra, you know,” he commented as he continued to thrust in and out in a steady pace, sighing and panting himself as he savored the tightness of the Prime’s valve as it squeezed down his rod.

He looked down fondly at the younger mech as Sentinel grabbed a pillow and bit into a corner to try and muffle his moans. Sentinel truly was a beautiful mech to look at, especially in pleasure. The old mech knew he should have felt guilty for interfacing with one of his subordinates but in truth, he didn’t. Sentinel was perfectly consenting -- as had been all the mechs and the rare femmes who had shared the Magnus’ berth; Ultra Magnus never pressured anyone into agreeing, and he made a point of always honoring the wishes of the mechs serving under him. Finding a lover, when you were the supreme ruler of Cybertron, was easy. Finding someone who wasn’t in for the money, favors and fame... it was much harder.

Oh, he knew Sentinel hoped to someday reap some benefits from their liaison, Ultra wasn’t blind. Compared to some of the mechs the Magnus had encountered over the vorns, he was however fairly tame and what he hoped for was benign. Plus, his valve felt really, really good, he thought, moaning as he felt his spike being squeezed so much harder as Sentinel’s valve rippled with another overload.

Yes. Sentinel wasn’t his ideal companion -- to be honest, Ultra Magnus very much doubted his dream mate truly existed -- but he was good enough. The old mech continued to rock his hips, watching the Prime’s face carefully as he brought him over the edge again and again. For one who admitted not being a valve mech, Sentinel came very easily, not that Ultra minded. It made the interface so much nicer.

He just wished that he could have enjoyed the end results of such sessions -- a Sparkling, that’s it. Ultra loved Sparklings, and when he had been young, he had wished to Bond and have a large family. Carrier or Sire, he hadn’t cared what he’d be so long he’d have a little one or ten to spoil. Sadly, life had had other plans for him. His gestation chamber had been crushed by a few bad hits in battle against Megatron during the War and, due to the delicate nature of a chamber, which was made from protoform metal, it hadn’t been possible to replace it. As for his ability to Sire...

Ah, but better not dwell on his regrets, he thought wistfully, shaking his head briefly. The present, he decided as a new ripple of Sentinel’s valve send him over the edge, was far more enjoyable.

*_*_*_*_*

A few orbital cycles later

Ugh. That was the very last time he went to Swerve’s instead of Maccadam’s, Sentinel swore mentally as he finished to purge his tank over a waste receptacle, wiping his mouth frantically to try and get rid of the taste of expunged, unprocessed energon. He didn’t know what the mech put in his cubes, but it didn’t do any good to Sentinel’s fuel tank.

Actually, perhaps it wasn’t just Swerve’s way of preparing his drinks, he mused as he let himself slide on the floor of his wash racks, enjoying the feeling of the cool tiles against his heated frame. He had been having trouble processing energon since a while now, but that hadn’t worried him more than that, at least at first.

Many energon batches served in the bars and restaurants across Cybertron came from the colonies or were experimental new mixes in order to find more powerful or nutritive fuels. Those from the colonies sometimes didn’t support the travel through the Space Bridge for an unknown reason, as for the experimental mixes... Experimental was really all you needed to know as to why they tasted like slag or didn’t rest easily in your tank.

That was it, he decided as he managed to stand up, shaking his head. He was going to send a few recriminations to the Civilian Guild in charge of fuel management and let them know exactly what he thought of the poor quality of the products they sold to the public. If Sentinel Prime was going to drink any energon, it'd be good stuff, and not the slag that kept making him sick in the morning!

Passing by the new ceiling high mirror he had installed in his quarters the first thing after becoming Prime and knowing he was on the right path to become Magnus, he glanced at it to check his finish, which he thought was perfect, as usual. Sentinel didn't allow himself to be seen as anything but perfectly buffed and waxed in case reporterbots would see him in the street -- he had an image to maintain as the Elite Guard sub-commander. Plus, the next Magnus had to look the part of a dashing mech, hadn't he?

He nodded at the sight of his dark blue plating shining just the right way and took a step further to leave the racks before freezing, his systems coming to a stall.

He backstepped immediately and started to look at his reflection with wide optics, especially at his abdomen.

For anyone else, there would have been nothing noticeable, and he could have appeared to have his usual well-defined, thin body which had gotten him a few holographic pictures in the magazine 'Aphrodite for Auto-femmes' where he had been described as a 'good catch for you ladies'. However, Sentinel wasn't just any bot. He had spent large amounts of time in front of this mirror, both to clean and wax himself but also to see what he looked like when he was making a speech, and he knew his reflection and his body perfectly.

His belly was bulging.

It was faint. Very, very faint, and as he had thought briefly, no one else would have noticed it but him. It was there, though, and Sentinel reached for the deformity -- because it was one, marring his perfect body! -- with shaking hands, petting himself with wide optics.

What the slag was that?!

He poked and tugged at the slightly, oh so slightly swollen spot with rising panic. Slag, slag, slag! Was it a deformation of his fuel tank? A shift in his protoform caused by an injury during training? Could be developing -- he shuddered at the thought -- a potbelly like some old or outdated models?

Oh Primus, he couldn't allow that to happen! His good looks would be ruined! How could he manage to win over the masses if he looked less than perfect?! He scrambled backward, mind racing to try and remember Red Alert's comm frequency -- the femme was a good medic who often oversaw the Elite Guard's officers, she was his first choice of specialist to consult.

As he tried to connect, though, he had to quickly put a hand over his mouth and run back to the waste receptacle as another wave of nausea overcame him. Dropping to his knees, he retched violently, emptying what was left of tanks before groaning as he dropped on his aft. Great. Just great. Not only was his belly swelling for an unknown reason and threatening his athletic form, but now his nauseas were increasing and...

Later, Sentinel thought that a bolt of lightning had struck him.

One moment he was ranting internally at the unfairness of his ailment, and the next he was sitting in shock as his dazed CPU added two and two.

Nauseas. Belly swelling. And several other little things he had complained about once or twice in

the last few decacycles but hadn't dwelled upon. Excessive tiredness at times, a few processor aches -- those he had attributed to working too hard and too long on very complicated files in order to secure a trade agreement with the natives of the Rigel system who weren't under the Autobots' protection. Recent back struts pains, likewise attributed to bad move during training and weightlifting.

Separately, they looked like nothing. Together, however, they were pointing toward a result Sentinel truly, but truly hoped he was wrong about.

He looked down at himself in horror before gulping and taking several deep breath through his intakes to calm himself. There was only one way to be sure at one hundred percent. Well, two. First, he was going to get down to street level and walk as calmly as he could toward the nearest pharmacy, and buy a dozen tests to take just to be sure. Then he was going to come back and use them all, again just to be sure.

In the meanwhile, he was going to take his day and pretend to be sick -- which he kinda was. It was rare he took a day of leave, but anyone could catch a virus, couldn't they?

And finally, he was going to go seek a medic's advice. If what he suspected was right, he couldn't risk contacting Red Alert. She was in the known about him and Ultra's activities behind closed doors, as she had been the one to 'clear him', and if she saw to Sentinel, she too would do the math and reach the conclusion Sentinel dreaded, and of course she'd jump on the comm to tell Ultra Magnus. And Sentinel couldn't allow that, not yet -- and perhaps not ever.

He was going to have to resort to someone else's services.

Calmly, or as calmly as he could anyway, he opened a comm link toward the nearest Elite Guard manned infirmary.

"Medic First Aid? Sentinel Prime here. I'd like to schedule a checkup for this afternoon, if you have time for me."

*_*_*_*_*

"Well, all my congratulations, Sentinel Prime! You're Sparked!"

Sentinel didn't whimper, but it was a near thing. Instead, he took on himself to smile in a strained way at the far-too-cheerful little medic who had come back with his results. That was why he didn't like to deal with First Aid; the young medic was very capable, but his over-optimistic and pacifist personality grated on the Prime's CPU. He sometimes wondered how a mech like that had managed to qualify for the Elite Guard. Talent could only get so far, after all.

But he was digressing, wasn't he? Trying not to shudder, he stared down at his belly again. Sparked. Of all the slagging, rust-filled, Pit-sucking thing that could happen to him! Not only Sparked, but Sparked with Ultra Magnus' offspring! He knew it had to be -- the Magnus was the only one who had ever spiked him in the last two or three stellar cycles, and the only one he had merged with in twice the same amount of time.

But Ultra Magnus was supposed to be sterile! He couldn't have Sparked him up!

"How... how far along?" he swallowed.

He needed to know how far the process had progressed so far. If he was still in the early stages, if the Spark was still underdeveloped and simply leeching off from his Spark -- the cause of the bursts of fatigue the Carriers experimented -- then there was a good chance he could still get rid of

the developing Spark, and no one would be the wiser, especially not the Magnus.

However, the apparition of the bulge, even if it was a slight one, seemed to indicate the frame had started to construct itself, and so that the Sparkling's Spark was ready to migrate in the equivalent of it's own Spark-chamber. The nausea was typical of this stage of the Carrying process -- they resulted from the constructions nanites leeching off trace elements in the energon and using them to strengthen themselves, but at the cost of corrupting the rest of the energon in the Carrier's tank.

If the developing Spark had already migrated... no medibot worth its crosses would agree to perform an abortion. If it was in its own Spark-chamber already, then the whole medical corps would deem it viable and already 'sentient', and Sentinel would just have to endure.

First Aid checked over his datapad, optics bright, and Sentinel could have sworn he was smiling under that mask of his. "It's already five orbital cycles old, Sentinel Prime, Sir. The Spark has recently finished growing and has migrated from your Spark chamber to the gestational chamber -- that's why you've been having so much nausea recently," he added as if Sentinel hadn't known that already. "We can make a first radiography if you wish to see the development. At this stage, the protoform mass hasn't developed, well, much of anything, but I've known Carriers who couldn't wait to have a first visual. Do you wish me to plan for one today? Unless you prefer to take another appointment?"

... He was slagged, Sentinel mentally groaned, optics twitching.

"Sentinel Prime, Sir? You don't seem very happy. Are you sure you're alright?" the little medic asked worriedly.

"Oh, uh, yeah, yeah, I'm alright," Sentinel mumbled. "It's just... so sudden. I hadn't expected that result at all."

Despite all the pregnancy tests he had used before coming all giving a 'positive' results, from the chips to install in a medical ports and which did a reading from your systems to the little sticks coated with a color-changing chemical which reacted in the presence of a Sparkling's construction nanites in the Carrier's lubricants.

Sentinel had continued to hope they were false positives, denying the obvious. But now a medic had done an official testing during a 'routine check up', he couldn't deny it any longer. Dear Primus...

"Oh, so it was unplanned then?" First Aid asked curiously, his enthusiasm deeming slightly. He perked up immediately though. "The Sire is going to have a nice surprise when you tell him the results!" he chirped.

"I guess so," Sentinel said carefully. He had no intention to tell the Magnus at all if he could! It was too risky! Old mechs like Ultra Magnus had this... thing about Carriers having to stop working and stay at home to take care of their Sparklings!

Those were outdated ideas that younger 'bots like Sentinel's generation didn't agree with, but they were still strong in Autobot society. He didn't see Ultra Magnus allowing the Carrier of HIS Sparkling to continue working. And Sentinel couldn't stop working yet! If he was forced to stop working as the Elite Guard sub-commander, he would lose everything he had worked so hard for those last three dozens stellar cycles! He'd be forced to take a break until the Sparkling was adult before he was able to go back to work and by then, younger, more ambitious Cadets could have booted him out of his rightful place!

No, he couldn't let Ultra Magnus know, which was exactly the point in going to First Aid in the first place! The little medic was a naive sort, and so long Sentinel didn't betray himself, the red and white 'bot wouldn't know who exactly the Sire was.

He coughed nervously as he pondered what to see. This... unexpected and most unwelcome burden shouldn't have come into being!

"Would you lie down please?" First Aid asked after rereading a few lines of his datapad. "I'd like to make a last reading in order to check your levels. If you still have purge, we may need to prescribe you supplements to balance out any deficits."

"Oh, uh, sure," Sentinel said. "Will that take long?"

"Not at all," First Aid assured him. "Just a few minutes. And I'll ask again, do you want a radiography of the Sparkling? It wouldn't take any time either. Unless you want your mate to be here? He or she would certainly like to be present for the first."

Sentinel's optics widened as he scrambled to find a good excuse. "Oh, I doubt he can! He's, he's very busy! Works on... Opulus," he added quickly, remembering a femme with whom he had interfaced and who had gone there. "We don't have a... steady relationship."

"Oh!" First Aid gasped, raising a hand to his facemask over the place his mouth had to be, shocked he had been so inconsiderate. "I'm sorry," he said gently. "But at least, he should be happy about the news? Everyone loves Sparklings."

"I dunno," Sentinel thought aloud. "The thing is, medic, that... well, neither I or my lover were expecting a newspark. My lover was told he was sterile," he mentioned in an airy way as he settled himself more comfortably on the medical berth. "Our... relationship evolved from here." Unsaid was the fact Sentinel certainly wouldn't have accepted to spread his legs for his lover had he know he risked to end up Sparked!

First Aid blinked. "Did he? Hum," the small medic seemed to frown despite his mask and visor, rubbing his chin. "He had to have been misdiagnosed, then. Or he may not have understood what he had been told."

"Oh?" Sentinel inquired politely, mind reeling. As if the Prime hadn't noticed himself! "Does that happen often?"

"Well," First Aid hesitated briefly. "It's rare, but it happens. Mind you, the medical corps rarely make big mistakes, but I can easily see how a new member just out of the Academy like I was a few stellar cycles back would have been confused over your lover results. I suppose they counted the nanites in his transfluid to reach that conclusion?"

"I, I guess so?" Sentinel stammered. "We never truly spoke about it."

First Aid blinked. "Oh. Okay. Let me explain, then. You know how transfluid is constituted of various fluids, including energon and coolant, in which nanobots are swimming, so to speak? And that the transfluid is stocked in a small reservoir which replenish after each spike overload?" At Sentinel's nod, he continued.

"Well, the exact composition of transfluid vary from one 'bot to the next, with some having a transfluid rich in nanites, and others having a poor nanites count. Most mechs have a count situated somewhere between 5,000 and 7,000 nanobots by load released, which is pretty much average. A mech is called 'sterile' when his nanites levels are situated at between 0 and 100, which is very

rare. I think such case represent, at last estimation, one mech on twenty.” The medic accessed one of Sentinel’s medical ports as he spoke, plugging in.

“100 nanobots or less are unable to form a frame, as a nanite’s life is very limited in time, and they won’t reproduce fast enough to actually form even the barest trace of a frame. That what we medibots call ‘true sterility’. However, the label ‘sterile’ can sometimes mistakenly attributed to ‘bots whose nanites count is higher, but insufficient still to Spark up a partner without a lot of luck. It isn’t so much a mistake that a generalisation, though, and something we refer to as ‘technical sterility’ between us. Take Ultra Magnus, for example,” First Aid pointed out helpfully.

Sentinel’s frame tensed up briefly before he sagged. No, First Aid didn’t know anything, he reassured himself. However, he was giving him just the information he was seeking. “Oh? Is the Magnus sterile?” he asked, feigning not to know about that little tidbit. Sterile, his aft!

First Aid snorted. “The tabloids and newsbots pretended so a long while ago. Damned cybervultures managed to pay a nurse to give her the results of a series of test he had undertaken to check out if he could Sire Sparklings,” he growled, and Sentinel blinked. The growl was very out of character for the cheerful little mech. As if noticing his outburst, First Aid coughed before his demeanor settled. “Anyway, they pretended Ultra Magnus was sterile after browsing through the results. On one hand, it had the beneficial effect to put an end to the false claims the Magnus had fathered such or such ‘bot Sparkling. But on the other, it certainly harmed Ultra Magnus’ sensibility. Anyway, they were mistaken... well, partially. Ultra doesn’t have what we call ‘true sterility’, but ‘technical sterility’. He actually produces nanites with his transfluid, only their actual count is low. It’s fluctuating, to tell the truth, and I haven’t reviewed his file in stellar cycles, but I seem to remember he produced between 400 to 600 nanites by overload... And maybe I shouldn’t speak about it,” he added sheepishly. “The case was used to illustrate a medical publication, so I guess anyone can ask, but it feels so weird to speak of our leader like that.”

“Indeed,” Sentinel smiled thinly. His CPU was processing what he had been told, and he was trying not to rage.

“I think your lover got confused over the separation between ‘true’ and ‘technical’ when the medic he consulted told him what his results were,” First Aid said after a moment of silence. “Most likely, he has a nanites count situated somewhere between 200 and 800, which are the margins we use to determinate ‘technical sterility’. And if the lovers he took before you had a low valve fertility rate, then he couldn’t have been proven wrong,” he finished, shaking his head.

“Valve fertility rate?” Sentinel inquired, optics narrowed. His legs shifted and crossed nervously, for he had the sinking feeling he wasn’t going to like it at all.

“When we counsel couples who are trying for a Sparkling but don’t manage to conceive, we usually separate a mech’s fertility rate between his valve and his spike,” First Aid explained. “Valve fertility is more difficult to calculate and to explain. It’s actually generic to discuss both the valve itself and the additional systems such as the role of the Spark, since a Sparkling can only emerge through a Sparks merge. Basically, by valve fertility, we cover a range of questions such as how much transfluid the gestation chamber can hold, its size, its expandability as well as the warmth of the future Carrier’s systems and the warmth of their Spark during a merge.”

“Warmth of the Spark?” Sentinel asked with dread. Hadn’t Ultra Magnus remarked on the warmth of his Spark the last time they merged?

“A tell-tale sign someone has a very fertile Spark,” First Aid nodded eagerly. “The warmth indicates the likelihood of the appearance of a newspark after the end of the merge, from the leftover energy residing in the Spark chamber. But it’s not enough to just Spark someone up, not if

he can't build a frame to host the developing newspark. Usually, the right Spark must come along with the right type of gestational chamber in order for a couple to conceive. Normally, it's not so complicated, since most of the population falls into the same patterns. For mechs who are dubbed 'technically sterile', it's much harder. Some may hope to carry, if their valve fertility rate is sufficient, but most are struck with what we call 'double sterility', even if it's only technical. And... I'm losing you, aren't I?"

Sentinel nodded grimly. "Oh yes, but please continue. I'd like to understand how that," he rubbed his belly absentmindedly, "could have happened to me."

"My best guess?" First Aid offered. "It comes down to you. You had the right kind of Spark and the right kind of gestational chamber for your 'technically sterile' lover to Spark you up -- or, if you wish, an extra warm Spark to retain the energy from the merge, but also a gestational chamber of the right size for a low count of nanites: small so the nanites stayed closely linked together, but easily extensible as the frame is going to grow. If it was also coupled with systems warm enough to allow your lover's nanites to live longer in your body, thus allowing them extra time to form a frame, then Sparkling you up became, well, Sparkling play," the medibot rubbed the back of his helm sheepishly. "The chances you two managed to meet, and to actually conceive together, were astronomically low. You're so lucky!"

"Yeah... lucky," Sentinel mumbled. Well, at least, it hadn't been done intentionally... which didn't help him calm down. If anything, it made him want to rage and rant even longer and harder. Of all the rusty luck!

First Aid unplugged from the Prime's medical port after a moment of silence, nodding. "Finished! I'm going to prescribe you a couple of supplements to take with every cube of energon you'll take from now on. They should allow you to retain your fuel better, though if your nausea continues, I suggest you switch to a more solid diet. Your tank will need more time to break down the different elements, so you will retain your fuel better this way."

Sentinel just nodded absentmindedly. Solid diet... well, it was going to be pricier than just grabbing a can of oil or a cube of energon, but he had the finances, so it wasn't a problem.

"Should I put you immediately on leave?" the medibot asked, and Sentinel froze.

"What?! No!" No way he'd stop working, especially not now!

"But Sentinel Prime, Sir, you can't continue working with a Sparkling on the way," First Aid said worriedly. "Well... you can for now, but there'll be a point where you'll need rest, especially as the frame grows bigger!"

Bigger... oh slag, Sentinel thought desperately. How was he going to hide that? Sooner or later, First Aid was right, his belly would grow too big to be hidden, especially given how thin his waist usually was, and the Magnus would notice. And then, he could kiss goodbye to his career! Unless Sentinel found a strategy, a way to hide himself and his state until the Sparkling was born? Once it was, he could drop it at a Youth Sector anonymously, and continue on with his life and his precious career.

That would be tough, but it was possible. He hoped. Hadn't he heard something about holographic generators in the Sciences Ministry? Hmm... He'd think about it later.

"I'm going to go back to work, medic," he said simply. "For now, my... pregnancy won't stop me from filling my duties. I'll place myself on leave once I feel I reached my limits," he added for the sake of appearance. First Aid nodded, looking slightly unhappy, but willing to go along with his

patient's wishes. Obviously, Sentinel wasn't the first 'bot who refused to be placed on leave immediately after being diagnosed Carrying. "Also," the blue mech added, "I wish you don't mention my state in my file or speak of it with anyone for now."

"What? But Sentinel Prime..."

"I insist," the Prime said firmly. "I don't wish to make my state public until I have to, in order to better concentrate on my work. It is my right, as stated in the Autobots' Code, paragraph 27 alinea 1.4."

"... very well, Sir," First Aid relented. "But citing the same Code as well as the medical oaths I took, I must insist you come back every orbital cycle in order to check the progresses of your Carrying cycles, as well as provide you and the Sparkling both with the best quality of healing possible."

Sentinel grimaced, but nodded reluctantly. He'd find a way to come over discreetly -- perhaps he'd schedule appointment late, after his shift was officially over. This way, he wouldn't have to take his day for coming and thus avoid suspicions.

"Agree," he said quickly. "Now, how about those supplements you want me to take?"

If he was forced to Carry a Sparkling to term, then he would do so in the best conditions possible; he didn't want to play with his health, after all.

Just hide away the fact he was Sparked up...

*_*_*_*_*

A few orbital cycles later

Something was... off with Sentinel, Ultra Magnus mused as he stacked a couple of datapads together on a corner of his desk. The supreme ruler of Cybertron leaned back in his seat with a sigh, optics glazed as he pondered the latest series of events.

Sentinel Prime was a private mech, that much the Magnus knew, even before they started their 'relationship'. He never invited anyone over at his place, never spoke much of his hobbies or whatever he did in his off-duty time -- eck, some Cadets whispered between them Sentinel Prime was just an over-sophisticated drone high command shut into a closet at the end of the solar cycle!

Ultra Magnus knew better, though. A drone would never have been so responsive and passionate in the berth, for a start. Plus, Sentinel let slip a few details here and there, for those who knew when to listen, or when he let his guard down. Over time, the Magnus had learned a lot about his subordinate, from his favorite polish -- Dr K.O.'s Special -- to his favorite energon batch. He loved his fuel slightly sour instead of sweetened like most mechs and he couldn't resist energon goodies with whipped oil cream topping. Sentinel listened to Windy's singles more than to Rosanna's, he had little fondness for pets aside of some species of Cyberhounds which made excellent guardians and trackers to hunt down criminals, he enjoyed watching the races on Velocitron but was against betting on them, and he wouldn't be caught dead at a Chromia's Pizza restaurant, despite being fond of their recipes.

All those little tidbits had come as confessions on the pillow, and Ultra Magnus loved extracting them from his lover while they cuddled. He had been looking forward to learning more but lately, Sentinel had declined all offers to interface with him.

In itself, it was puzzling, for Sentinel had rarely turned down an offer until now -- and usually, they

were motivated because the Prime was too busy working on a project, or because he had to leave Iacon for an inspection somewhere. Now, his refusals didn't seem motivated. He just... politely refused, without offering a motive. However, he was perfectly free to do so, Ultra Magnus had reasoned to try and comfort himself; it was in the Prime's rights to stop their affair should he wish to, and the Magnus couldn't force him into anything. It would be a gross misuse of his authority, something he had already fought to avoid.

Still... Sentinel looked strained whenever Ultra tried to breach the subject with him, and he seemed to flee the room whenever the Magnus came near him, even in a perfectly innocent context. The way the Prime's optics darted left and right was quite telling. It made the older mech wonder if perhaps he had done or said something that his Second had misinterpreted or which had made him angry.

But no, that couldn't be it; if so, Sentinel would have told him... at least Ultra hoped so.

The end of their interfacing sessions wasn't the only thing that made the Magnus puzzled, though. Sentinel had also changed his habits and his work hours, and that in itself was much more alarming.

Sentinel Prime had always been a creature of habits, ever since his graduation from the Academy. His schedule had never varied -- or at least, not significantly so -- ever since he was made a Prime, and one always knew where to find him at any moment of the day. At least, they used to.

Since a few orbital cycles ago, the Prime had drastically changed his habits. For one, he had started to come to work much earlier, when barely anyone was in the Metroplex, and he left work earlier as well -- however, he still covered his normal megacycles count, so it didn't affect his work performance. Still, this sudden change was puzzling. The blue Prime had also started to take his midday fuel break in his office, whereas he had used the break to socialize in one of the Metroplex rec room until then.

That made the Magnus frown. It was like Sentinel Prime was purposely trying to avoid his fellow Autobots. But it made no sense! Sentinel might have been a very private individual and a strict adherent to the Autobot Code and regulations, but he loved to spend time with his subordinate. Well, he liked being the center of the attention of the troops and impress newly named Cadets, and the fuel break was the best moment of the day for him to do so.

Not only that, but the Prime had also started to take days off. Sentinel Prime never took days off! One day it was because he was calling him sick, another because he had decided to use some of his accumulated leave time -- which he had never done before. True, he had the right to use them whenever he wanted, but for a mech who had never taken holidays before? Not only that, but the Prime had dropped vague hints he intended to use all of his accumulated leave time in the coming stellar cycle, which amounted to at least three orbital cycles off. From a mech like, say, Jazz, it wouldn't have warranted an optic bat. From someone like Sentinel Prime? It was like alarms were blaring!

Yes, there really was something off about the younger mech, and Ultra Magnus didn't seem to be able to put his digit on it.

The worse part, however, was that it bothered the Magnus. It bothered him to the point he couldn't focus on his work anymore. Every now and then, his hands twitched as he fought not to dial Sentinel's console number to ask him to come. It disturbed his reading time and his many rendezvous. Alpha Trion had mentioned more than once that his 'old friend' looked absent, in one instance breaking him out of daydreaming by snapping his fingers right before the Magnus' optics.

"I don't know what your problem is, Ultra," the old whiskered mech had said, "but I suggest you resolve it quickly. We need you at your sharpest right now. You don't think those ambassadors we're going to receive will play nice when we set down terms, do you? So whatever is on your mind, get it out of your systems!"

The Magnus grunted as he leaned further in his seat. Sound advice, of course, but easier said than done! The old mech couldn't even say what was bothering him exactly! He only knew that Sentinel's acting so out of character was drawing him to distraction. Truly, he hadn't realized he had become so attached to his Second, and the realization was unsettling him. They both were supposed to be in just for the interfacing, and instead... instead, the Magnus had started to care.

He groaned, taking his helm in his hand.

"Something the matter, boss bot?"

The Magnus online'd his optics and looked with disapproval at the mech who had just entered his office. "I thought I told you to stop calling me like that, Jazz. This is far too familiar."

The white and black Cyberninja just smiled as he dropped a pile of datapad on the desk, Ultra Magnus grimacing as he realized he would have to read through them and give them his seal of approval. "You told me," he agreed. "But you like it when I'm familiar, don't you, Sir? It gives you a break," he winked, and Ultra Magnus felt a smile tug at his lips. It was true enough. "Everything alright, Boss bot?"

The Magnus stiffened. "Perfectly fine. What shouldn't it?"

Jazz gave him a flat look that clearly said he wasn't buying it, and that he wasn't afraid to call it as he saw fit. "Suuuuuuure," he drawled. "That's why you have sighed thirteen times since this morning alone, that you snapped at your secretary five times since yesterday, and that you're daydreaming half the time someone come in -- including now."

"I did no such thing," Ultra Magnus protested, processor spinning. Had he really done that? Jazz knew tabs on everyone, and he wasn't the kind of mech to lie -- not over something so trivial. He sighed. "I did, didn't I?"

Jazz nodded. "Yep. Honestly, Boss bot, if you have a problem..."

"Everything is fine," the Magnus said immediately before groaning at the black and white mech's unimpressed look. "Very well, everything's not fine, but I'm not even sure what the problem is," he confessed.

"Easy, your problem is called SP." At the dark look he received, the Cyberninja raised his arms in the air in surrender. "Eh, easy, Sir! I don't mean to imply anything! Well, okay, I'm trying to," he admitted as the look darkened. "I'm just saying Sentinel Prime hasn't been acting like himself lately, and since you like your habits as much as SP does, it bothers you, 'cause you don't see a reason for why he changed, and you both won't speak about it. 'm wrong?"

He... wasn't, slag it. Ultra Magnus groaned. Jazz didn't pat him on the shoulder -- it would have been a breach of protocol -- but he looked sympathetically at him. "Sir? Do you want me or someone from the Intelligence Department to tail him? If you really wish to have answer as to why his attitude changed recently, we could easily do so."

For a moment, Ultra Magnus considered the idea seriously. It would be oh-so-easy; Intelligence had many Agents, some of them sleeper Agents, mingling with the general population, not to

mention all the informants they had. They could easily follow Sentinel around without suspicion. Same thing with Jazz, really; as a Cyberninja, he had training in stealth that was unrivaled but by the best of Intelligence. Still...

"No," he finally said, leaning back in his seat. "As tempting as it is, it would be a gross misuse of our resources for something that doesn't warrant it."

"Are you sure? What to say Sentinel hasn't been compromised?" Jazz asked clinically, startling the Magnus. "His behavior has become quite suspicious in light of his usual activity pattern, which might be the sign he has run into trouble. He could have been converted to the Decepticons' ideology, or he could have run across a blackmailer. Spying on him could determine quickly what the problem is."

"... no," Ultra Magnus said again, optics narrowed in thought. "I agree Sentinel acts unlike himself. I also agree that his newly secretive, introverted behavior is... worrying me," he admitted, "but I won't subject my Second to Intelligence screening. No. I'll speak to him," he decided. "Sentinel knows better than to lie to his superiors. Should I ask him the truth, I'm sure he'll tell me. I shall call him in immediately and..."

"He's not here, Sir," Jazz corrected. "He's already left for his apartment half a megacycle ago."

Ultra Magnus blinked. "Already? That's... that's most unusual," he finished after a beat of silence. "Well... I suppose I could go see him directly," he mumbled. "No sense in waiting, is there? Besides, perhaps he will be more talkative outside of the office."

"Perhaps he will be," Jazz nodded, though he wasn't smiling.

Ultra Magnus didn't fidget awkwardly -- he was the supreme ruler of the Autobots, he didn't act like a nervous Youngling in front of one of his trusted mechs! -- but he coughed before standing up and grabbing his hammer to regain his normal composure. "Well... I will be going then."

"You know the address?"

Ultra Magnus sorted. "Of course I do." Indeed he knew where Sentinel lived; he knew where all his officers lived, just in case there was an emergency. "Inform Alpha Trion and the rest of the Council I won't be available for the rest of the day. I expect to head home straight after speaking with Sentinel."

"As you wish, Sir," Jazz saluted as he watched Ultra Magnus leave. He kept his composure until the door closed and he heard the heavy step of the large blue mech progressing through the corridor, upon which his face broke into a grin and he resisted the urge to snicker.

Really, Sentinel was an idiot for trying to hide his state, and Ultra Magnus a bigger idiot still for not having noticed what was going just under his olfactory sensor! The ninjabot shook his head with amusement. Really, if Ultra Magnus had been a little more attentive to what went on around him, he would have noticed Perceptor's complaint about missing or displaced experimental equipments from the Ministry of Sciences, right after a visit of Sentinel. He would also have noticed said equipment natures and its possible uses for a mech who didn't want the world to know he was Sparked up.

Yeah. Sentinel was an idiot, and Ultra Magnus was about to have a good surprise, if he asked the right questions and was inquisitive enough. Not to mention, holograms or not, once he pressed against Sentinel, there would be no way he'd miss the obvious.

Whistling, the ninjabot left the office. His task was done, and he had Councilmechs to inform they wouldn't be seeing the Magnus for a while yet.

*_*_*_*_*

The drive to Sentinel's place went both longer and shorter than Ultra Magnus would have wished. There was a traffic jam at one moment, caused by an altercation between two drunkards as they left a bar, and so the Magnus ducked into a side alley. Actually, he mused as he rolled, it was probably best he avoid the main roads in order to stay discreet. His silhouette and vehicle mode were very well-known, and he wished to keep a low profile at the moment.

Sentinel lived in a quiet, middle-class neighbors on the second ring of Iacon -- not too far from the center of Iacon, but far enough as to not been incommoded by the noises of the main traffic roads, the nightclubs and various bars opened 24/24. It wasn't a bad place for an outstanding officer, Ultra Magnus mused as he transformed in front of the building after checking no one was around to see him. It wasn't a very remarkable place at first glance; a standard five stories tall building, with a row of rectangular windows panels in thick, dark glass. Knowing Sentinel's taste for quality and luxe, he would have pinned the mech to live in something more... grandish. Then again, it wasn't a bad place.

He passed the door and reached the lift in no time -- he didn't need to enter a security code like the normal residents, for all buildings on Cybertron were equipped with a special scan letting the Magnus and Autotroopers enter at will.

The measure hadn't been a popular one when it was passed over, too many people being afraid of strangers invading their privacy -- well, that was the fear of honest, good-standing citizens. Thieves, mob members and dealers had been more afraid of being burst out by a surprise raid. However, it was now generally accepted as a necessary evil in some rough neighborhood where crimes had once run rampant. Criminals were more easily apprehended when Enforcers could enter without a noise and surprise them home before they could hide or throw away the fruits of their criminal activities.

So long the Enforcers didn't abuse their rights -- something Ultra Magnus and the Courts were quick to punish them for -- the population just grumbled and let things run their course. There hadn't been a single protest against the measure in almost a vorn, and the Magnus hoped it stayed that way. Granted, he wasn't against amending the measure should it prove necessary, but for now, Cybertron's Law Enforcement division and Justice Courts had bigger things to worry about.

First floor. Second floor. Third floor. Fourth floor. The lift stopped and opened with a 'ding', Ultra Magnus stepping out with a deep intake as he turned left toward what he knew to be Sentinel's door. There was only three apartments a floor, so he didn't risk losing himself. He peered for a moment at the nametag installed on the door. 'SP'; it made the Magnus smirk as he read it. Either Jazz had come over to change the tag himself, or Sentinel, in an attempt to hide who he was exactly, had chosen to mark his door with the Cyberninja's nickname for him.

Hmm. Knowing them both, the first option was probably the right one.

Gently, he knocked on the door. No answer. He frowned before ringing the bell and waiting a few moments. Still no sign of activity. He knocked again, louder this time, while ringing the bell a second time. When no one came to open, the Magnus took a step back, unhappy. Was Sentinel not at home... or was he deliberately avoiding to answer the door?

His optics narrowed, and the weight of his hammer seemed suddenly more present in his hand. He fought down the urge to use it to shatter the door -- it would not only be bad manners, but it would

also lead to questions he didn't wish to answer to from the neighbors who would notice the noise. Frowning, he put his hand over the handle, toying with it and wondering if perhaps he should send a comm over to Sentinel, asking where he was, when the door opened.

Optics widening in disbelief, he looked at his hand on the lowered handle. The door... hadn't been locked? He almost hit himself before wondering what to do. Should he enter and wait for Sentinel inside, if the mech was really absent? Or wait in the corridor? After a moment of reflexion, he decided that waiting inside was probably for the best -- he didn't want anyone to see he was here, after all.

He closed the door carefully behind him before looking around. It was the first time he came over Sentinel's place, and he couldn't help but be curious. It looked... pretty much as he imagined it would be. Drab gray walls, a darker floor that was spotless -- obviously Sentinel took care of cleaning the place regularly and with as much attention as he gave his own frame. The apartment wasn't that big; a small entry opening on a living room with a couch, a low table, library shelves filled with datapads and small decoration objects, and a large Tri-D screen, separated from a cooking area by a bar counter with high stool. A door further to the right must have been leading to the berthroom and was currently closed. Another door, resting ajar, on the left had to lead to the wash racks...

Wash racks which were occupied, Ultra Magnus noticed, his handle on his hammer tightening. He could hear the sounds of... retching from here. Slag; was Sentinel sick? Was that why he had become so secret?

Cautiously, he walked over, calling the Prime's name. "Sentinel? Sentinel, are you here?"

Spark beating, he pushed the door further open. "Sentinel? Are you alrig...?"

He froze. His optics widened while his Spark skipped a beat, his breath intake stalling.

"S... Sir?!" Sentinel squeaked from his position on the floor in front of a waste receptacle. His arms tightened around his abdomen, as if to try to hide himself, but Ultra Magnus had seen it. The bulging of his belly, already big like... like a small-sized Hydro-melon! It was impossible to miss - and he didn't know how Sentinel had managed to hide it before, not with the size it was!

Sentinel Prime was...

Sparked up.

Ultra Magnus swallowed, feeling dizzy as his CPU started to make connexion. Sentinel was Sparked up. Carrying a Sparkling. Except, Sentinel had told him repeatedly he had currently no lover but Ultra Magnus -- Ultra Magnus, whose chances to Sire a Sparkling were almost of 0 thanks to his low nanites count. Logically, it couldn't have been his...

... but Sentinel claimed to have no other lover, and Ultra Magnus believed him. Which meant...!

"Sir, what are you doing here?! You...!"

"Sentinel Prime," Ultra Magnus cut him, optics blazing as he took in the sight of that nice bulge, the promise of a new life and future Autobot soldier. "is it mine?" he asked, his voice deep and unforbidding. His Spark fluttered like crazy as he waited for an answer, a confirmation he didn't dare to hope for...

The Prime seemed to hesitate for a long while before lowering his gaze. "... Yes, Sir. It is."

And Ultra Magnus' Spark exploded with joy.

*_*_*_*_*

Earlier

Sentinel closed the door of his apartment behind him with a sigh of relief and went straight to the couch, flopping down and burying his helm in a cushion. Dimly, he was aware he had forgotten to engage the door's lock, but after a moment of debate, elected not to worry about it for now. The neighborhood was secure and none of his neighbors were supposed to be at home at this time of the day, so it wasn't as if there was a security risk. Besides, he felt too tired and weary at the moment to rise.

Shifting and turning to lie on his side, he glared at his belly. Slagging parasite was syphoning all his energy those days.

Oh, well... Now he was finally home, he was going to rest. First off, though, he needed to drop the disguise.

He sat down with a grunt and slowly, with wary gestures, he reached through his subspace pockets, feeling and groping around to try and find the little device providing his camouflage. It took him a while, because the slagging things had moved again and weren't easy to turn on and off, but he managed to make them click right. They came apart and dropped in his hands even as the illusion field around his frame came apart.

Until then, he had appeared to still be his flat, handsome self. Now, his abdomen was bulging in what the Prime considered to be an obscene way, completely ruining his good looks. With a sigh, he put his hands over the bulge in his plating and felt it around. Ugh. Damn thing hadn't gotten bigger, which was a relief, but also a source of worry. At ten orbital cycles, the Sparkling should have been much bigger already and almost ready to pop out. Instead, it was still relatively small, even if Sentinel's belly now had the size of a Hydro-Melon. Of course, normally, Carrying mechs had a Sire to provide more nanites and accelerate the gestation process...

Ugh. He didn't want to think about it, Sentinel decided as he grabbed the illusion projectors he had dropped earlier and checked them over to make sure they were still in perfect working order. He couldn't afford them short-circuiting when he was at work, after all; he had managed to keep his secret until now, and he had no intention to reveal his state if he had any say about it!

He gazed at them critically. At first glance, they didn't look like much. One could have mistaken them for a pair of round magnet a little thicker than normal, with a series of minuscule buttons on the side -- one of the reasons they were so hard to activate and deactivate in Sentinel's mind. The small 'projectors' were gadgets still in development at the Sciences Ministry that Sentinel had 'borrowed' during a tour after remembering a previous demonstration he had witnessed when a few eager new graduates from the Academy had presented their study projects.

The 'projectors' had been a command from the Intelligence Department during Highbrow Prime's time, but the project had been scrapped in favor of more important business -- as well as less costly ones. The initial idea had been the create a camouflage allowing a 'bot to become completely invisible for spying missions, mimicking a 'Sigma ability' observed on a noblemech named Mirage. Sadly, a 'Sigma ability' wasn't so easily copied, and after several pricy failures, budget constraints and then the mysterious disappearance of Highbrow, the whole invisibility device thing had been abandoned.

The notes, however, had inspired a small group of students into readapting the project into

something more accessible, by shifting the focus from invisibility to the more well-known and usable hologram technology. It was nothing new, but the way they had applied the principle had raised a few optic ridges and got them subventions and a place in the most junior echelons of the Ministry.

Now, the Prime considered himself fairly intelligent, but the way those things worked totally went way over his helm. He understood the general principle, though. The 'projector', hidden into subspace, allowed the apparition of a 'refraction' field that hide away or rather, modified the appearance of the mech using the projectors while suppressing the hums and general bugs that riddled the usual hologram projectors. In itself, it couldn't hide away a mech, but if used with other camouflage items such as the electromagnetic paint also developed by the Sciences Ministry, it could allow Intelligence Agents on a mission to quickly change appearance without anyone being the wiser and hide away in a crowd in a matter of breems.

Of course, the process wasn't perfect yet. The 'refraction' field was currently quite small and couldn't yet 'change' a mech's size, for example. Also, like all holograms, the projections were just illusion. Should someone bump into the person using the projectors, they'd find out quickly about the camouflage. However, for all the things still to correct, they were in perfect working order. So, when placed right next to a growing belly, the 'projectors' could easily make said belly appear perfectly flat and normal.

Something Sentinel had realized all by himself and something he had acted upon quickly by borrowing a pair of prototypes. He thought he had covered his traces well until now, since no one had come to him over the disappearance, but if anyone should... Well, he could always pretend to have decided to test them himself for X reason.

He'd worry about it later.

For now, though, those 'projectors' were showing themselves quite useful, and he made a mental note to add a recommendation to their creators' files. Eventually. Of course, given they were just projecting an illusion, Sentinel still had to take additional precautions. He couldn't afford to bump into someone, because then they would have felt the deformed shape of his abdomen. Thus why he tried to keep to himself those last few orbital cycles, and why he had turned down all offers to interface with Ultra Magnus again.

Coming to work earlier and leaving earlier from his office allowed him to meet less mechs at Fortress Maximus and reduced the risk of physical contacts. It was the same reason he avoided the rec room; too much risk of accidentally running into someone by distraction, although it wasn't the only reason.

Given 'there wasn't a Sire around', Sentinel had to take more supplements than normal with his energon in order to ensure the good development of the Sparkling's frame. Had he done so in public, he could never had kept his secret hidden. Medic First Aid and him had had long heated debate over the fact Sentinel's lover hadn't manifested himself yet, and the small medic was becoming more and more suspicious of the Prime and his refusal to amend his file to mention the fact he was Carrying.

Nosy, stupid mech, Sentinel mentally grumbled, massaging the bulge of his belly slowly. Primes outranked medics; he shouldn't have questioned him! But for all his cheeriness and meek demeanor, First Aid could be incredibly obstinate when it came to his 'patients well-being'. So far, Sentinel had managed to placate him, but he had the sinking feeling it wouldn't last much longer. Either the medic was going to blab to the wrong person, or he would amend Sentinel's file despite the Prime's reluctance, and anyone who consulted it would learn the truth.

Time, he feared, was running out. Perhaps he should take his leave now, and get off of Cybertron for a while, until the Sparkling was born so he could put it up for adoption? It was tempting, he had to admit, however given the pregnancy was progressing slowly, he couldn't be sure of how long he'd need to remain away. It was probably best to wait one orbital cycle more, perhaps two.

He sighed as he leaned over and lay on his side in the couch. He felt so bloated and weary. His back strut was starting to hurt due to the additional weight he had put, and at the rate the Sparkling grew, he'd have to endure it for an unknown duration. He glared down at himself again. Frag that stupid parasite! And frag Ultra Magnus while he was at it! If he had known the mech had not been truly sterile, he would never have spread his legs for him! ... Or perhaps he would have invested in a lot of anti-Sparking items.

He was pondering turning on the Tri-D to listen to the news channel when a wave of nausea hit him and he jumped to his pedes, running to the wash racks and dropping to his knees in front of the waste receptacle before he purged his tank.

"S... slag," he moaned before retching again. Fragging nausea! They had become less frequent since First Aid had prescribed him even more additives to add and since the Prime had switched to a more solid diet, but every now and then he still had trouble processing his fuel. Thankfully, so far it hadn't happened at work, a small mercy in Sentinel's opinion.

He leaned forward again as another wave hit him -- a less important one, and he didn't actually purge this time, but he still felt sick, his fuel tank upset and threatening to empty itself from what it still contained. Gradually, the nausea and the dizziness started to dispel, and Sentinel pressed his heated forehead against the blessedly cool tiles above the waste receptacle -- his core temperature had risen since the start of his Carrying cycle, which was normal but very annoying; he constantly felt as if he was overheating. Optics shuttered, he was getting back to his senses when he heard noise and a voice.

A very dreaded voice. He lighted his optics suddenly as the door of the wash racks opened with a creak.

"Sentinel? Are you alrig...?"

He froze. The Prime's optics widened while his Spark skipped a beat, his breath intake stalling as he gazed up at the high stature of Ultra Magnus, who was staring at him with optics probably just as large as his own were.

"S... Sir?!" he stammered, quickly bringing his arms around his waist in a feeble attempt to hide his growing middle -- which was ridiculous, he had to admit it to himself mentally. The Magnus had seen already, and there was no hiding his belly now.

Hundreds of questions raced through Sentinel's mind; why was the Magnus here? How? When did he come in? How come Sentinel hadn't heard him enter? What was he going to think? Oh slag, would he be angry? What was Sentinel going to do now the cybercat was out of the bag? Pit, why hadn't he locked the apartment door?!

He... he needed to say something, anything. Protest the Magnus' intrusion into his private quarters, for example; that wasn't just done!

"Sir, what are you doing here?! You...!" he started to say only to be cut off.

"Sentinel Prime," Ultra Magnus said, optics blazing as he looked at Sentinel with a weird intensity and the Prime utterly froze. "Is it mine?" he asked, and his voice was both deep and foreboding.

Sentinel swallowed. What... what should he say? He could lie, of course; not about being Sparked up, because it was obvious what the bulge of his abdomen stood for. He could however pretend the Sparkling wasn't the Magnus' own. That could work... but for how long? What if the Magnus didn't believe him anyway? What if he ordered him to present him the Sire? Or what if he ordered him to go through a paternity check -- a fairly simple and quick procedure that never lied?

If he lied, Ultra Magnus would be furious! If he was furious, then Sentinel could kiss his job goodbye! Of course, considering the circumstances, his job was done for already, but there might still be a way for him to save his career. Yeah... think positive, he tried to convince himself.

Whatever he said next could very well determine his future. He could bargain to have his position kept for him while he was on leave, or something. Perhaps he could ask for a raise... Or perhaps he could ask for a reward or a pension, if he'd gave the Magnus the Sparkling to raise -- assuming the Magnus wished the Sparkling to live with him and wanted to raise it himself instead of just financially helping Sentinel. Come to think, he didn't know what the Magnus thought of Sparklings; the subject had never came up during their interfacing sessions, but then again, who would have brought Sparklings in a conversation with a (supposedly) sterile mech?

Sentinel swallowed again, discreetly. Lowering his gaze, he took his decision. Better tell the truth and... see what would happen. "... Yes, Sir. It is."

He wasn't expecting the Magnus to drop his hammer to the ground -- Pit, how was he going to repair the tiles?! -- and to throw himself at him, making him stand up and then hugging him for dear life just as the bigger mech claimed his lips in a passionate kiss.

Sentinel made a muffled sound and started to return the kiss awkwardly. Well, he hadn't expected that kind of reaction, but it wasn't an unwelcome one. At least it meant Ultra Magnus wasn't angry with him... yet. He might not have had the time to realize Sentinel had hidden the news from him, all busy as he was kissing him and exploring his mouth with enthusiasm.

Something poked at his thigh. Breaking the kiss with a shake of his head, Sentinel glanced down and let his optics widen slightly. "Sir?" he asked uncertainly as he caught sight of the fully pressurized spike of his superior officer. Ultra Magnus' engine was revving, a sure sign he was eager to get down to business.

"Hush, Sentinel. Let me show you... let me show you how happy this news makes me," the Magnus rumbled before claiming Sentinel's lips again, kissing him with as much passion and desire as before, his spike pressing insistently between Sentinel's legs while his hands started to roam over the Prime's frame -- and particularly over his belly, as if to make sure this was indeed real.

The touch was starting to revv up Sentinel in turn, who after a beat and a few muffled moan, let his valve cover snap aside, revealing the already swollen lips of his valve, gleaming with lubricant. His body had felt overly sensitive ever since two orbital cycles ago, and he had spent many night cycles self-servicing in an attempt to calm his growing libido.

His body had wanted the Sire of his Sparkling to give him fluids to better build the frame, to feel his Spark next to him to make the Sparkling's aware of its other parent's presence and EM field. Now that Ultra Magnus was here, eager to frag him, he was succumbing to a temptation he had pushed back more or less successfully for decacycle, and so he just whined as he felt himself lubricate more, his valve positively dripping. Ultra Magnus gently guided him down, making him lay flat on his back on the cool white tiles floor, hands caressing him everywhere while he watched Sentinel's swollen belly with incredible tenderness.

Sentinel keened as a finger entered him, trusting in and out at a slow rhythm before being swiftly joined by a second, stretching him further. Ultra Magnus leaned over and kissed him again, mindful of his weight in order not to crush the precious treasure inside the younger mech. Sentinel answered easily, glossa intertwining with the Magnus' own.

"Mhhh, Sir," he moaned as the Magnus returned his attention to his valve, still using his fingers to prepare him while his thumb had started to rub in slow circle over his external node, sending a rush of pleasure down his array and making him clench the walls of his valve harder around the invasive fingers. Ultra Magnus chuckled.

"Very eager, aren't you? Don't worry, I don't intent to make you wait much longer."

Sentinel blushed, hips rocking to try and match the pace of the fingers inside him, trying to made them go deeper. He was acting like a two-credits worth whorebot, which was humiliating, but he couldn't stop himself. He... he needed Ultra Magnus, his CPU was insistent about it, and his body longed for more pleasurable sensation.

He keened in loss, his valve clenching over nothing as the fingers stretching him slide out of his heavily lubricating valve. The Prime relight his optics -- when had he shuttered them? -- to look at the Magnus, his previous blush coming back with force as he witnessed Ultra Magnus rub his lubricant-coated fingers over the bulbous tip of his spike as well as on the rest of his shaft. This was... this was... Sentinel swallowed as the now lubricated tip, from which a few beads of pre-transfluid were already escaping, was carefully aligned with his valve.

Ultra Magnus took Sentinel's hands in his own, pinning them at Sentinel's shoulder level, finger intertwining. "You're giving me such a marvellous present, Sentinel," he whispered amorously, shifting his hips forward, Sentinel hissing as the spike started to push past the opening rim of the valve, sliding down easily inside. "I had stopped hoping so long ago, and suddenly... Yes, a marvellous present indeed, one I intend to thoroughly thank you for."

"Ooooooh! Ah... dee... deeper, Sir," Sentinel panted, only half listening, his attention concentrated on the feeling of being stuffed full by that thick ridged spike his body had craved for. His legs tied themselves around Ultra Magnus' waist, trying to bring him closer, deeper inside. It was the only encouragement the Magnus needed to slide the rest of his spike inside the younger mech, each ridge rubbing against the nodes inside the valve, setting them alight and bringing Sentinel to the edge of a first overload.

"Hmm, so tight... so hot," the Magnus grunted as he fully sat inside the Prime's valve. Sentinel moaned.

"Sir..."

"Ultra," the Magnus cut him. "Ultra. The Carrier of my Sparkling can call me by my name," he said before kissing Sentinel again, pressing his body just enough against Sentinel's own to feel the precious swell of the younger mech's abdomen. He resisted cooing at the idea a new life he had helped creating was resting against him, instead deepening the kiss as he started to gently move inside Sentinel. The Prime was answering well to each of his move, his systems running hot and his valve clenching almost desperately around his rod.

He could have lose himself in that moment -- Sentinel under him, writhing in pleasure, the feeling of his spike buried deep into that tight, so receptive port trying to milk out his transfluid, the shape of Sentinel's Sparkling-full belly pressing against him, signifying he was going to be Sire. It was perfect. Utterly perfect.

“Oooh, Sentinel, Bond with me,” he groaned in pleasure as he picked up his pace, not waiting or expecting an answer as Sentinel shouted, overload washing over him and sending him beyond any coherent thought. This was only the first of many, the Magnus swore to himself. He was going to have the Prime limp in his arms, reduced to a puddle of contentment before the megacycle was over. Smiling widely, he thrust harder, knowing his own first overload wouldn’t be long coming, not with the way Sentinel’s port worked so hard to suck his spike deeper in. Good. So good...

“U... Ultra... Ultraaaaaaaaaa!!!!”

Sentinel cried and panted, blue optics shuttering as his body tensed, valve rippling madly. So good! The Magnus had just said something... but the Pit if he could analyze what yet. Whatever was being said at this point didn’t matter. The only thing that did was that spike pounding into him -- something which ordinarily, he wouldn’t have cared much for -- and his systems intended to fully take advantage of its presence and the transfluid it would be providing him and his Sparkling with.

Coherent thoughts and answer would have to wait for later, he decided as the Magnus bended over to kiss him again, while their intertwined fingers tightened their hold on each other. Yes. Much later...

*_*_*_*_*

In the end, Ultra Magnus couldn’t quite remember how many times they did it, as he had been too tremendously happy to keep track of his passion. If he had to think back, though, he could remember fragging Sentinel first on the wash racks’ floor, then against the wall of said wash racks before moving across the Prime’s apartment. There had been the floor again... the berth, where he had made sure to properly ‘honor’ the Prime a few extra times... the counter separating the kitchen from the living area proper as they grabbed a cube of energon to drink to replenish their tanks... and that was probably how they had ended up in the couch, cuddling.

The Magnus had had some processor blowing overloads over the course of his long life, but this was truly the first time he remembered having so many with the same partner and on the same day... night... whatever time it was now. The announce he was going to be a Sire had truly done wonder for his berth prowess, even if now he just wanted to sink into blessed recharge, exhausted as he was from making love again and again to his future bitlet’s Carrier.

Sentinel was sitting in his lap, slumped against his chest, optics dims and looking as exhausted as the Magnus did. His plump belly was resting against Ultra’s flat one, and the Magnus couldn’t help but cup the bulge of the armor amorously. To think Sentinel was going to give him a Sparkling in...

And this was when the Magnus paused, frowning as he truly looked at Sentinel and at his swollen silhouette. Insanely happy at the news he was going to have a Sparkling, the detail of Sentinel’s Carrying cycle had utterly flew from his mind. Now he couldn’t quite bend the Prime over or push him flat on the next surface to frag him, his mind was becoming clearer, sharper.

Sentinel’s belly had been perfectly flat the last time he had seen him before coming over -- barely a few megacycles ago. Such a bulge couldn’t appear in just a few megacycle -- a Sparkling took whole orbital cycles to develop to this point! Which brought in a lot of unwanted, worrisome questions. How the Pit had Sentinel managed to hide his state for so long. And a much bigger question: why?!

Though his hand still cupped Sentinel’s belly carefully, the other grabbed the younger mech’s wrist with strength. Sentinel’s optics lighted up and he leaned back slightly, obviously surprised by the gesture and probably uncomfortable. Ultra Magnus wasn’t holding him so strong it would hurt

him, but it was still a lot of pressure. “Sir? What...?”

“Tell me, Sentinel, how far along are you?” Ultra rumbled, optics slightly narrowed.

The Prime gulped and tried to break the hold on his wrist, which only prompted the Magnus into tightening it. “Ah, Sir, it’s not...”

“How far along, Sentinel Prime?” the Magnus asked again, looking at the Prime in the optics, on a tone that suffered no argument. He was worried; he didn’t know what Sentinel had done, nor for how long he had done so, and he feared that whatever method he had used could have been harmful to the developing Sparkling. And... Pit, a Sparkling could beneficiate from regular ‘fluids donations’ in order to grow bigger, faster! That Sentinel hadn’t told him anything, hadn’t come to see him, truly stung. Had he... gone to other mechs to help build the frame? Or had he been irresponsible enough to not seek any help?

Yes, now that the haze of happiness was clearing, the Magnus had thousands of questions and worries rushing to his CPU. And he was getting very suspicious of his Second. Not about the Sparkling’s paternity -- given how easy it would be to read the developing Sparkling’s coding for identification, Ultra Magnus had no doubt Sentinel had told him the truth. But to have hidden the fact for Primus only knew how long... It made alarms rang under his helm. Alarms but also, under it, a vague sensation of anger which threatened to grow as he waited for Sentinel’s answers.

The Prime hesitated, refusing to look at him in the optics. Ultra’s glare intensified, making the younger mech swallow nervously. “... ten orbital cycles, Sir,” he finally admitted in a small, nervous voice.

Ultra Magnus thought he was going to choke. “Ten...?!” He looked at Sentinel’s swollen belly with alarm. At ten orbital cycles, most Sparklings were already ready to unfurl out of their Carriers’ body, their frames completed. Despite its obvious roundness, there was no way the Sparkling Sentinel carried was completed -- not with Ultra as a Sire, or with Sentinel as a Carrier! Both were in the tall end of their respective frame classes, so logically, any Sparkling of them should be, well, big!

“Sentinel, what have you done?” he whispered, and the Prime tensed.

“I... I did nothing wrong, Sir!” the Prime sputtered, and Ultra Magnus grabbed his chin to make him look at him in the optics, looking at him closely, tensely. Sentinel stiffened, his nervousness increasing as he swallowed dryly, but Ultra Magnus didn’t release him.

He was too busy ordering his thoughts as to properly question his Second on the ‘hows’ and especially the ‘whys’ of the matter. He vented deeply. “Ten orbital cycles,” the Magnus said, deceptively calm. “Ten orbital cycles, and you never saw fit to tell me I was going to be a Creator, Sentinel Prime?” The Prime tensed up again. “May I inquire as to why you didn’t?”

Oh, but it was so hard to keep his voice level and steady, when all he wanted right now was to rant and rage at the deception his Prime had pulled, hiding away the precious life blossoming in his gestation chamber, a life Ultra had helped to created despite all the odds! However, the Magnus knew outright shouting never solved anything in such situations -- he had long stellar cycles of experience to draw from, after all. And so he continued to stare and wait for an answer, not letting go of either the Prime’s chin or his wrist, locking him in place in his laps. Their interface components were still bare and the heat Sentinel was emitting was almost enough to make the Magnus mellow, but Ultra wanted answers, and he would get them.

The Prime swallowed. “Well, uh, you see, uh...” he stammered, unsure and trying covertly to break

the old the bigger mech had on his wrist. "I was... I was..., uh..."

"Yes?" the Magnus prompted. "I'm waiting. You were?" he was still polite, but there was a steely edge piercing underneath the pleasantness.

Sentinel's optics shifted to the side as much as he could as his vents released a strong gust of air. "I was afraid," he finally admitted, mumbling and cheeks reddening.

Ultra Magnus paused. "Afraid? Afraid of what, Sentinel Prime?"

"... anything... everything?" Sentinel answered weakly, and the Magnus released the younger's mech chin, optics shuttering briefly as he considered the answer.

Fear. His shoulders sagged. Of course. Such a simple answer, but conveying so many meanings, so many possibilities. Fear could lead a mech to make stupid choices. It was quite possible Sentinel had indeed been afraid of the... the situation, the Magnus had to admit. Carrying could be a long, sometimes difficult process, and one many 'bots didn't venture into unless they felt ready and fully prepared, usually once they had reached a certain social standing or had managed to secure a good housing and credits.

Given their trysts had never been aimed toward conceiving an offspring, for the simple reason Ultra didn't think he could, there had never been any discussion over such a serious matter between them. Sentinel was... young, Ultra reminded himself. Young, and foolish, and not always thinking straight when he was under duress, something which had been noted early on by his superiors. The Prime had never expected anything but some favors from their make-out sessions. The sudden discovery of his state might have come as a shock he hadn't known how to deal with.

But, the Magnus reminded himself, it was Ultra's Sparking! Had Sentinel deluded himself into thinking the Magnus wouldn't be happy at the unexpected news? Wouldn't take his responsibilities? Wouldn't care for him and the unborn bitlet? If so, Sentinel was a bigger fool than Ultra might have imagined... Even if the Magnus had never mentioned how happy he'd be to be a Creator. Perhaps some of the fault lied with him here.

His optics snapped back open, and he looked at Sentinel's face thoughtfully. So, because he had been afraid of the consequences, afraid to come forward and admit his situation, Sentinel had tried to hide the fact he was Sparked. Hmm. The Magnus wasn't fully convinced it was the whole truth and he wasn't about to just forgive Sentinel for his deception, but he could see it. Somewhat. It would be on par with Sentinel's profile at any rate.

Ultra still wanted more details about what had gone through the Prime's head, though. Especially on how Sentinel had managed to hide that charmingly swelling belly for so long. Which reminded him...

"We need to have you examined by a medic," Ultra rumbled, going back to cup Sentinel's belly. He almost expected to feel a kick, but there was nothing -- not that he was disappointed or anything! He had just been hoping... He mentally worked over which medics affiliated with the Guard were on planet. Red Alert was his first choice, as she was usually his attending physician, but she was supposed to leave soon for Athenia, unless she was gone already? "I don't know how you managed to hide yourself but it could have affected..."

"It didn't," Sentinel said quickly. "And I, uh, already saw someone? He has my file, prescribed me supplements,... I'm fine, honest!"

Ultra raised an optic ridge at him. "Is that so? And who is this medic, Sentinel? What did he

prescribe you with?" His optics narrowed suddenly. "Did you already consult with a midwife to assist with the delivery? Have you already bought everything you needed for the Sparkling once it's born?"

The Prime in his lap blinked owlishly, like a Diopase-Doe caught in the light. "I, uh... n-no? First Aid told me about the additives I needed but I-I forgot to ask about the other... stuff?"

The Magnus scrolled down his memory files, searching for any mention of the name of 'First Aid'; he knew the mech, albeit distantly -- a recent graduate, a young mech, rather talented, very cheerful if a little shy around authority figures, the Magnus must have crossed path with him only twice, including the formal speech he had given to new Guard postulants. A good medic -- but not the Magnus' first choice to oversee the gestation of his Sparkling, mostly because the mech was young and not a specialist. He'd have to see if the younger medic could transfer Sentinel's files to Red Alert first thing...

Primus.

Suddenly, Ultra experienced a brief moment of dizziness as he realized how unprepared both him and Sentinel were for the Sparkling's emergence. From the look of it, Sentinel hadn't make any serious preparation yet, asides of taking additives to make sure the Sparkling developed healthily -- which was good, but clearly insufficient. Silently, he cursed about scared young 'bots and their poor decision-making skills. That... that wouldn't do at all. Nor, he realized as he looked around, optics narrowed, wouldn't it do at all for Sentinel to stay in this small apartment.

Mentally, the Magnus worked a primary list of things to do.

He needed to take Sentinel to Red Alert for a health check, and he'd call for First Aid to bring in all files he had pertaining to Sentinel's Carrying cycle so he could pass them down and discuss them at length with Red Alert. He'd need to have the femme medic put Sentinel in contact with competent, trustworthy nurses and midwives to help when the emergence would happen. He'd have to put Sentinel under guard as well, he realized with a jolt. While Decepticons hadn't attempted an assassination attempt against Ultra Magnus since the end of the Great War, they still remained a threat and he wouldn't put past Megatron to try and harm or kidnap Ultra's heir and its Carrier. And the Decepticons weren't the only ones who might try something; Ultra had made his own fair share of political enemies during his vorns as Magnus and while he doubted they would sink so low, he wasn't about to take any risk. He was going to move Sentinel to the Magnus Manor before the solar cycle came to an end, he decided fiercely, optics darkening. There were plenty of rooms for the Prime to choose from if he didn't want to share Ultra's -- which he was going to offer first, because like the Pit he was going to be kept apart from his future creation now that he knew it was on the way!

His hand pressed harder against Sentinel's belly, neatly resting over the bulge to make sure it wasn't a mirage and that it wasn't about to disappear. But it wasn't; it still felt solid and real under his hand, and he was eager to continue making it so.

He was going to have to prepare a nursery as well, he realized. Sparklings toys, blankets, plushies, a cradle, a crib for when the Sparkling would be bigger,... And he was certain he was forgetting things, but it was alright, they still had some time before them. Ultra was going to take a few decacycles off as it was; he would need time in order to prepare himself and install Sentinel home. More urgently however, he'd need to double or triple the guard around the house when Sentinel would be in, he thought dimly as he gathered the Prime in his arms and hugged him close. Even without outside threats, paparazzi bots would hang around the moment it was revealed the Magnus was going to be a Creator, and he wasn't about to let the cybervultures bother Sentinel Prime or the

bitlet if he had anything to say about it! Trustworthy Guard members -- he'd let Jazz pick them out, the mech had a knack to choose the most reliable 'bots.

What else...?

Oh, yeah. He wasn't going to let a Sparkling of his enter this world without a proper Sire. He had made a demand during their, ah, 'moment of passion' earlier but now he needed to do it properly.

Gently, he caught one of Sentinel's hands in his and kissed it gently.

"Sentinel?"

"Sir? Uh, Ultra?" the blue mech replied warily, catching himself when the Magnus raised an optic ridge at him.

"You hide something very important from me, Sentinel Prime," the Magnus started, and the smaller mech seemed to shrink on himself. "Something I'm willing to call a miracle, for I had given up all hopes a long time ago to ever see it happen. You're Carrying my Sparkling -- our Sparkling," he amended amorously, optics gently trailing the bulge in Sentinel's armor. "You've just made me the happiest mech on Cybertron. However, there is one thing I must ask from you, should you be willing. You see, I don't want to see my Creation enters this world without a true set of Creators ready to greet him -- or her. A true, legal set of Creators, as is proper by Autobot's law."

He looked at Sentinel in the optics.

"Sentinel, would you do me the honor of Bonding with me and becoming my Conjunx Endura?"

*_*_*_*_*_*

"Sentinel, would you do me the honor of Bonding with me and becoming my Conjunx Endura?"

It took all of Sentinel's willpower not to cringe. There. He had said it.

The Magnus had fragging asked for him to become his official mate. Just as Sentinel Prime had feared he would once he learned about the Sparkling. Well, not exactly; he was more afraid that the Magnus would insist on Sentinel leaving the Guard to take care of the Sparkling, but becoming his Conjunx Endura was the first step in that direction, he had no illusions about it.

Even if Ultra Magnus was willing to let Sentinel continue to further his career (and Sentinel wasn't so sure about it in the first place, what's with old mechs' opinions on working Carriers), there was no way mechs like Alpha Trion or the different factions of the Council allowed the Magnus' mate to retain any type of real authority in the Elite Guard. They'd be screaming about nepotism and an obvious breach of Autobot Law and Sentinel would end up frog-marched out of his office and summarily discharged from the Guard to avoid 'conflicts of interests' and nevermind the fact he had worked hard to get his current position and was actually competent for the job.

That was so unfair!

Of course... well, Ultra Magnus wouldn't stay Magnus forever, would he? Sentinel paused and thought hard about it.

Ultra Magnus wasn't that young anymore and he'd have to retire eventually. And when he did, nothing would legally stop Sentinel to go back to the Elite Guard or even to propose his candidature as the new Magnus even. Technically. Hopefully. There wasn't many mechs able to

replace the Magnus at the moment, but Sentinel feared that in his absence, someone eventually would step him. There already were whisper about the new Prime they had sent to protect Athenia, Rodimus Prime.

Ugh.

That said... being the Magnus' official Bondmate had perks too. Access to the Magnus' Mansion, for one. Status. Power, even if only nominally. And Ultra Magnus wasn't ugly to look at, even if he wasn't a young mech anymore. He was even good company, Sentinel had to admit, even if he didn't always see optics-to-optics with him on budgets and the importance of strengthening the military over assuring a good education for civilians and encouraging artists.

Still, Bonding? The very idea made Sentinel squirm.

Then again... Ultra Magnus had proposed Bonding *and* Conjunx Endura, which wasn't exactly the same thing.

Bonding meant putting your Sparks on the same wavelength in order to make them compatible and create specific quantic bonds in order to link together two or more frames and processors. You could pick out your partner(s) thoughts and feelings even when far apart. It was, to most Cybertronians, the epitome of romanticism because it demanded efforts, love and absolute commitment. Conjunx Endura, however, was a more 'civil' type of union, where 'bots only had to perform a ceremony that could be public or private and then registrate their new union with the proper authority. It was the most common type of union, allowing for a mech to name his Conjunx as his next of kin if anything happened to him.

One didn't have to be Bonded to be named Conjunx Endura, nor the reverse. Many Bondmates started as Conjunx Endura and progressively became more over time, though the double combination wasn't nearly as common as romance holovids made it sound.

Did the Magnus even truly wanted him as a Bondmate anyway? What he wanted was for them to be an 'official set of Creators' -- to be put on records as being the Carrier and Sire of the newspark that was deforming Sentinel's belly. Which actually had nothing to do with being Bondmates and everything to do with filing paperwork to 'officialise' their union -- being Conjunx Endura.

Sentinel coughed and shifted awkwardly, far too aware that he still had to let his panel slide back to cover his interface array (but so did the Magnus) and unsure of how the older mech was going to take what he was going to say. "A... according to Autobot Law, paragraph 107, alinea 4, any demand to officially become Conjunx Endura must pass through the Personal Liaison Office for approval. Forms will be handed to applicants and will have to be filled in quadruple exemplaries and returned to the office under an orn. After which, another orn might be needed before the couple receive the official certificate declaring them as Conjunx Endura and be registered as such in all of Cybertron's systems and archives. Any other rites pertaining to the recognition of the Conjunx Endura status on a religious standing might be undergone separately before or after the reception of the state certificate, but only a certificate properly delivered by the Personal Liaison Office has any official recognition by the authorities."

He was babbling, he knew that, but he couldn't stop himself. Ultra Magnus was staring at him, blinking and frowning.

"Sentinel... you don't want...?"

The blue mech gulped. "Sir... Ultra... I'm not ready for, for Bonding stuff." He looked away, hoping the Magnus wasn't going to take it the wrong way. Thankfully, he just continued to hold

Sentinel's hand, though perhaps he was squeezing it a little harder than before. "But... if you want us to sign the Conjunx Endura papers together... to give the Sparkling's legal status..." he trailed off, not trusting himself to speak.

If he added anything more, he was probably going to trip over his own words and say something stupid and it would probably irritate Ultra Magnus and the last thing he needed was the Magnus angry at him. He had already dodged a bullet when the old mech hadn't pressed him on more details on how he had managed to hide his Carrying cycle and why -- and he would ask sooner or later, Sentinel was under no illusion -- and Sentinel couldn't exactly tell him what his true plans had been.

He lowered his gaze on his hand, which Ultra Magnus had started to stroke with his thumb.

"I see," the old mech murmured. "I suppose it's my fault. I was too fast, too brutal in the delivering. It's true we had never spoken of... Well, of many things. And we need to." His optics were focused on Sentinel's belly. "Conjunx Endura would be a good first step... but let's not be too hasty, shall we? The first thing to do is to take you to a medic I trust for a check up -- and it's non-negotiable, Sentinel Prime," he added with a dark look at the Prime who was opening his mouth to protest. Sentinel wisely decided to shut up. "Another thing which is non-negotiable is your move to the Mansion, where I can make sure you're well-protected."

Sentinel paled a little. It hadn't occurred to him that Carrying the Magnus' Sparkling could put him in danger, but now that the old mech mentioned it... Once the news would reach the medias, it would change a lot of things and bring a lot of uncomfortable and potentially dangerous attention on Sentinel. He gulped, his hand absentmindedly coming to rest on the swell of his belly. "Right," he croaked weakly. "No problem with that, Sir."

Either the words or the gesture, as unplanned as it was, seemed to calm the Magnus. "Good," he rumbled, starting to stroke Sentinel's hand again. The Prime tried not to squirm as he felt something poke at his thigh. "I sent Jazz a word asking for an escort back to Fortress Maximus. They should be here in a cycle."

"A cycle? My apartment isn't that far..." He lowered his gaze and blushed. The poking against his thigh was becoming more insistent, and he could understand why. "Though I suppose we could use the privacy?" he added in a small voice.

"We definitely could," the Magnus nodded, hands sliding down Sentinel's frame to rest on his hips. "And then we'll talk. Seriously."

Sentinel leaned forward and sighed softly against the Magnus' neck as he let the bigger mech caress his frame everywhere, teasing him and heating his systems. Well, that wasn't at all how he had hoped things would go after he had learned he was Sparked. Of course, it could have been worse; he was under no illusion about it. At least the Magnus didn't seem angry about the fact he had tried to keep it hidden and he was open to discussion (or a certain form of discussion anyway). At least for now.

And it was in Sentinel's best interest to keep it that way. If that meant playing nice, going to see Red Alert and get probed and poked until the femme medic was satisfied with her results, getting an escort for going from place to place, signing a Conjunx Endura pact and enduring lots of cuddling and interfacing with the Sire of the Sparkling that was nestled inside his frame... well, there were worse things to deal with, he supposed.

Gently, tentatively, the Prime kissed the bigger mech's neck, moaning softly as Ultra Magnus dug into seams. He could feel his spike pressing against his belly, ready to sink down into him the

moment the Magnus decided he was done with foreplay.

Sentinel had no idea what would happen in the future; for now, he was just going to try and enjoy himself.

End

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